

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LUBUMBASHI 0842

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: EMIN, CG
SUBJECT: VISIT TO KOLWEZI-STATUS OF GECAMINES

REF: (A) STATE 171040, (B) LUBUMBASHI 0819

1. SUMMARY: VICE CONSUL VISITED GECAMINES CONCENTRATOR AND METALLURGICAL PLANTS IN KOLWEZI ON JULY 11, ALL OF WHICH WERE WORKING AT NEAR CAPACITY LEVELS. GECAMINES ZAIRIAN OFFICIALS AND A FEW EUROPEANS DISCUSSED PRODUCTION PROBLEMS AND THE NEED FOR EXPATRIATE ASSISTANCE. ALL AGREED THAT EXPATRIATE ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN CURRENT HIGH PRODUCTION LEVELS BUT THE ZAIRIANS HOPE THE NUMBER WILL BE KEPT TO 20-30 PC OF FORMER NUMBER (450) CONSULATE BELIEVES IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THIS NUMBER OF EXPATRIATES WILL BE RESIDENT IN KOLWEZI BY END OF AUGUST WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED TO PREVENT PRODUCTION LOSSES. END SUMMARY

2. ON JULY 11, VICE CONSUL VISITED GECAMINES KAMOTO CONCENTRATOR LUILU COPPER-COBALT ELECTROLYTIC PLANT
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AND UZK ZINC-CADMIUM REFINING PLANT. TIME DID NOT PERMIT VISITS TO OTHER INSTALLATIONS, BUT MINES AND OTHER WASHERIES/CONCENTRATORS ARE LESS SOPHISTICATED AND THOUGHT TO BE SIMPLER TO RUN AT NEAR-FULL CAPACITY. GECAMINES ZAIRIAN CADRE AT EACH PLANT DISCUSSED THEIR ACTIVITIES AND PROBLEMS. RESULTS OF THESE INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

3. KAMOTO CONCENTRATOR: THE KAMOTO CONCENTRATOR IS THE MOST MODERN OF ALL GECAMINES CONCENTRATORS, ACCOUNTING FOR ABOUT 33 PC OF ALL COPPER CONCENTRATES AND 31 OC OF COBALT CONCENTRATES. RESTARTED ON MAY 31, AND PLANT ACHIEVED 100 PC OF PRODUCTION CAPACITY OF COPPER AND COBALT CONCENTRATES BY THE END OF JUNE. THERE WAS NO DAMAGE DUE EITHER TO COMBAT OR THE GRADUAL SHUTDOWN PROCESS. THE ZAIRIAN CADRE IN CHARGE AT KAMOTO WAS DIRECTOR BEFORE THE MAY 13 ATTACK. TEN EXPATRIATE ENGINEERS AND TECHNICIANS WERE WORKING AT KAMOTO BEFORE THE ATTACK. ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTOR THEIR ABSENCE HAS NOT BEEN IMMEDIATELY FELT-- ZAIRIAN CADRE HAVE EFFECTIVELY REPLACED THE EXPATRIATES IN PRODUCTION POSITIONS. THE GREATEST DAMAGE IS CAUSED BY A LACK OF MECHANICAL MAINTENANCE EXPERTISE. THE DIRECTOR ESTIMATED THAT HE CAN GO AT FULL PRODUCTION ONLY FOR 1-2 MONTHS WITHOUT A MAINTENANCE ENGINEER AND ONE OR TWO MASTER MECHANICS. WITHIN 2-3 MONTHS ELECTRICAL MAINTENANCE WILL BE NECESSARY.

4. LUILU COPPER-COBALT ELECTROLYTIC PLANT: THE LUILU PLANT IN 1976 ACCOUNTED FOR 59 PC OF THE COMPANY'S COPPER CATHODES AND 55 PC OF ITS COBALT CATHODES. THE ZAIRIAN DEIRECTOR AT LUILU IS AN ENGINEER WHO HAD A THIRD-LEVEL MANAGEMENTS POSITION BEFORE THE EVACUATION OF EXPATRIATES
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(ASSISTANT TO ONE OR TWO DEPUTY DIRECTORS) GECAMINES HAD ABOUT 100 MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AT LUILU. NOW ONLY THE 45 ZAIRIANS REMAIN. DESPITE THE LACKFOF MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL AND A SHORTFALL IN SULFURIC ACID SUPPLIES EITHER THE FROM LIKSASI OR IMPORTED FROM MOZAMBIQUE AND ZAMBIA, LUILU HAS MANAGED PRODUCTION LEVELS AT 85 PC CAPACITY FOR COPPER AND OVER 90 PC OF CAPCITY FOR COBALT. PLANT IS CURRENTLY PRODUCING 25 TO 30 TONS OF COBALT A DAY. PLANT DIRECTOR TOLD VICE CONSUL THAT LUILU IS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO "PUCH" COBALT PRODUCTION.

5. ALTHOUGH THE ACTING DIRECTOR IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT LUILU CONTINUING PRODUCTIVITY, HE DID ADMIT MECHANICAL MAINTENANCE WAS A PROBLEM. TWO-THREE MONTHS WAS THE LIMIT OF PRESENT PRODUCTIVITY, WITHOUT MECHANICAL EXPERTISE. ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTOR A TEAM OF 3 OR 4 MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS OR MECHANICS ON A PERMANENT BASIS WOULD BE AN ENORMOUS BENEFIT AND WOULD SECURE THE PRESENT PRODUCTION RATE THROUGH THE SHORT TERM. EVIDENCE OF MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS IS ALREADY AVAILABLE: THE METAL STAMPING DEVICE USED TO FLATTEN COPPER STARTER SHEETS HAS BROKEN DOWN, AND NO MECHANICS ARE AVAILABLE IN

KOLWEZI FOR REPAIRS. THE PLANT IS ALSO MUCH MORE UNTIDY AND SEEMINGLY HAPHAZARD THAN DURING VICE CONSUL PREVIOUS VISIT ON MAY6. THE ZAIRIAN HYDROMETALLURGICAL ENGINEER WHO SERVED AS GUIDE TOLD VICE CONSUL THAT SPARE PARTS ARE MORE OF A PROBLEM THAN EVERY BEFORE, PREVIOUSLY BECAUSE QUALIFIED MECHANISTS AND MECHANICS ARE NOT AVAILABLE TO DEVISE REPLACEMENT PARTS WHICH ARE NOT STOCKED OR TO JERRY-RIG SYSTEMS UNTILL PARTS CAN BE PROCURED. IN ADDITION TO ALL OF THESE PROBLEMS THE LUILU FACTORY LOST ALL ITS AUTOMOBILES AND PICK-UPS COMPLICATING THE LOGISTICAL PROBLEM.

6. UZK: IN 1976 THE UZK PLANT PRODUCED 62,962 MT OF ZINC AND 252 MT OF CADMIUM. THE ZINC FACTORY NORTH
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OF TOWN SUFFERED THE GREATEST DAMAGE OF ANY GECAMINES INSTALLATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE MAY EVENTS. ONE OVEN USED IN THE FINAL PROCESSING OF ZINC ELECTROLYTIC CATHODES INTO INGOTS 99.95 PC PURE WAS CRACKED WHEN ZINC BEING PROCESSED COOLED AND EXPANDED AFTER THE POWER LOSS. DESPITE THIS MAJOR SETBACK (UZK HAS ONLY TWO SUCH OVENS) THE ZAIRIAN ENGINEER IN CHARGE (FORMERLY DEPUTY DIRECTOR) STATED THAT PRODUCTION IS NOW AT 70 PC OF CAPACITY THE OVEN IS EXPECTED TO BE REPAIRED BEFORE THE END OF JULY. OTHER PROBLEMS ARE LACK OF SULFURIC ACID TRANSPORT OF REACTIVES AND CONCENTRATES (UZK IS DEPENDENT

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ON CONCENTRATES AND REACTIVES FROM LIKASI AND KIPUSHI IN VARIOUS STAGES OF THE REFINING PROCEWS) AND LACK OF SPARE PARTS. UNLIKE THE TWO PREVIOUS INSTALLATIONS MAINTENANCE IS NOT AS MUCH OF A PROBLEM AS YRODUCTION ENGINEERING. (THE PRESENT ZAIRIAN DIRECTOR IS A MAIN TENANCE ENGINEER) THE UZK PLANT IS OLD AND USES OUT OF DATE TECHNOLOGY TO LARGE EXTENT. HOWEVER THE PROCESSING OF ZINC IS A DIFFULT AND COMPLICATED BUSINESS. THE ZAIRIAN DIRECTOR ESTIMATED THAT A 30-50 PC RETURN OF UZK'S 25 EXPATRIATE PERSONNEL WAS INDISPENSABLE FOR CONTINUED HIGH QUALITY REFINING OF ZINC. CADMIUM PRODUCTION A RELATIVELY SIMPLER PROCESS IAT AT 85 PC OF CAPACITY.

7. COMMENT: OVERALL THE ZAIRIAN LEADERSHIP OF GECAMINES KOLWEZI APPEARS CONFIDENT ENERGETIC AND EFFECTIVE. THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY PROUD TO HAVE RESTARTED OPERATIONS WITHOUT LARGE EXPATRIATE INPUT AND ARE HOPEFUL THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENT WILL BE NOTICED.THEIR PERFORMANCE LEANDS CREDENCE TO THE CLAIM THAT THERE HAD BEEN TOO MANY EXPATRIATES AT KOLWEZI BEFORE THE ATTACK. IN EARLY MAY
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THERE WERE ABOUT 450 EXPATRIATES AND 375 ZAIRIAN CADRE AND ENGINEERS RUNNING THE GECAMINES KOLWEZI OPERATIONS THAT ARE NOW BEING HANDLED WITH MODEREATE EFFICIENCY BY THE 375 ZAIRIANS SUPPLEMENTED BY A HANDFUL OF VISITORS FROM LUBUMBASHI.

8. PROBLEMS EXIST AS THE ZAIRIAN STAFF READILY ADMITTED. THEY ARE OVERWORKED AND HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO HARASSMENT BY THEIR OWN SOLDIERSLM THEY CANDIDLY ADMIT THEY LACK EXPERTISE IN SPECIFIC AREAS AND LOOK FORWARD TO THE RETURN OF A SLECTED NUMBER OF EXPATRIATES. THE ZAIRINAS AT KOLWEZI SPOKE OF 20-30PC OF THE FORMER NUMBER OF EXPATRIATES AS DESIRABLE. GECAMINES EXPATRIATES EXECUTIVES IN LUUMBASHI THOSE WHO ADMIT GECAMINES MAY HAVE EEN OVER STAFFED IN KOLWEZI SPEAK OF 75 PC AS A MORE REALISTIC NUMBER. LOWER LEVEL ZAIRIANS AND EXPATRRiates IN LUBUMBSHI SPEAK OF 50-60 PC OF THE FORMER NUMBER AS A REALISTIC FIGURE.

9. PRODUCTION FIGURES REMAIN VERY GOOD. THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONTINUING EMPHASIS ON COBALT AS THE JUNE PRODUCTION OF 1,050 MT SHOWED. ALL OF THE ZAIRIANS HOWEVER

SAID THEIR PRESENT LEVELS COULD NOT BE MAINTAINED WITHOUT AN INFUSION OF OUSDE ASSISTANCE WITHIN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. WITHIN THE NEXT ONE OR TWO MONTHS BRACKDOWNS OF INCREASING SERIOUSNESS CAN BE EXPECTED. SOME MAY EFFECT LONGER TERM OPERATIONS AS EXPATRIATE CADRE WARNED WHEN THE PRESIDENT ORDERED ALL INSTALLATIONS RESTARTED IN EARLY JUNE. AS YET THERE HAVE BEEN NO DECISIONS ON REHIRING EXPATRIATES FOR KOLWEZI. AFTER THE REHIRING DECISION IS MADE, THERE REMAINS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER SUFFICIENT NUMBERS CAN BE FOUND WHO ARE WILLING TO WORK IN KOLWEZI. BECAUSE OF THESE DELAYS IT
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IS VERY UNLIKELY THAT KOLWEZI WILL BE RESTAFFED WITH A MINIMUM OF 25 PC OF ITS FORMER EXPATRIATE STAFF IN RESIDENCE BY THE END OF AUGUST WHEN THE SHORTAGE OF TALENT CAN BE EXPECTED TO RESULT IN PRODUCTION DECREASES.

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